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NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

AND OTHER POEMS

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To My Wife

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1916

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

I.

Moonlight silvers the ghostly tops of trees,
Moonlight whitens the lilac-shadowed wall;
And through the soft-starred evening fall,
Clearly, as if through enchanted seas,
Footsteps passing, an infinite distance away,
In another world and another day.
Moonlight turns the purple lilacs to blue,
Moonlight leaves the fountain hoar and old,
Moonlight whitens the sleepy dew,
And the boughs of elms grow green and cold . . .
Our footsteps echo on gleaming stones,
The leaves are stirred to a jargon of muted tones . . .
This is the night we have kept, you say :
This is the moonlight night that never will die . . .
Let us return there, let us return, you and I,—
Through the grey streets our memories retain
Let us go back again.

II.

Mist goes up from the river to dim the stars,
The river is black and cold; so let us dance
To a tremor of violins and troubled guitars,
And flare of horns, and clang of cymbals, and drums;
And strew the glimmering floor with petals of roses,
And remember, while rich music yawns and closes,
With a luxury of pain, how silence comes . . .
Yes, we have loved each other, long ago,
We moved like wind to a music's ebb and flow . . .
At a phrase from the violins you closed your eyes,
And smiled, and let me lead you . . . how young we were!
Waves of music beneath us dizzied to rise . . .
Your hair, upon that music, seemed to stir . . .
Let us return there, let us return, you and I,
Through changeless streets our memories retain
Let us go back again.

III.

Mist goes up from the rain-steeped earth, and clings
Ghostly with lamplight among drenched maple trees,
We walk in silence and see how the lamplight flings
Fans of shadow upon it . . . the music's mournful pleas
Die out behind us, the door is closed at last,
A net of silver silence is softly cast

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

Over our dreams . . . slowly and softly we walk,
Quietly, with delicious pause, we talk,
Of foolish trivial things, of life and death,
Time, and forgetfulness, and dust and truth,
Lilacs and youth.
You laugh, I hear the after-taken breath,
You darken your eyes, and turn away your head
At something I have said—
Some tremulous intuition that flew too deep,
And struck a plangent chord . . . to-night, to-night,
You will remember it as you fall asleep,
Your dream will suddenly blossom with sharp delight . . .
Good-night! you say . . .
The leaves of the lilac softly dip and sway,
The purple spikes of bloom
Nod their sweetness upon us, and lift again,
Your white face turns away, I am caught with pain,—
And silence descends . . . and the dripping of dew from the eaves
And jewelled points of leaves.

IV.

I walk in a pleasure of sorrow along the street
And try to remember you . . . the slow drops patter,
The mist upon the lilacs has made them sweet,
I brush them with my sleeve, the cool drops scatter,

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

And suddenly I laugh . . . and stand and listen
As if another had laughed . . . a fragrant gust
Rustles the laden leaves, the wet spikes glisten,
A shower of drops goes down on stones and dust.
And it seems as though it were you who had shaken
the bough,
And spilled the fragrance—I pursue your face again,
It grows more vague and lovely, it eludes me now . . .
I remember that you are gone, and drown in pain . . .
Something there was I said to you, I recall,
Something, just as the music seemed to fall,
That made you laugh, and burns me still with
pleasure . . .
What were the words—the words like dripping fire? . . .
I remember them now, and smile, and in sweet leisure
Rehearse the scene, more exquisite than before,
And you more beautiful, and I more wise . . .
Lilacs and spring, and night, and your clear eyes,
And you, in white, by the darkness of a door:
These things, like voices weaving to richest music,
Flow and fall in the cool night of my mind,
I pursue your ghost among green leaves that are ghostly,
I pursue you, but cannot find . . .
And suddenly, with a pang that is sweetest of all,
I become aware that I cannot remember you;
The beautiful ghost I knew
Has silently plunged in the shadows, shadows that
stream and fall.

v.

Let us go in and dance once more
On the dream's glimmering floor,
Beneath the balcony festooned with roses.
Let us go in and dance once more . . .
The door behind us closes
Against an evening purple with stars and mist . . .
Let us go in and keep our tryst
With music and white roses, and spin around
In lazy swirls of sound.
Do you foresee me, married and grown old? . . .
And you, who smile about you at this room
Dizzy with whirling dancers—is it foretold
That you must step from tumult into a gloom,
Forget me, love another, grow white and cold?
No, you are Cleopatra, fiercely young,
Laughing upon the topmost stair of night;
Roses upon the desert must be flung,
It is your wish . . . Above us, light by light,
Weaves the delirious darkness, petals fall,
They fall upon your jewelled hands, they tremble upon your hair,—
And music breaks in waves on the pillared wall,
And you are Cleopatra, and do not care . . .
And so, in memory, you will always be—
Young and foolish, a thing of dream and mist;
And so, perhaps, when all is disillusioned,

And eternal spring returns once more,
Bringing a ghost of lovelier springs remembered,
You will remember me.

VI.

Yet when we meet we seem in silence to say,
Pretending serene forgetfulness of our youth,
'Do you remember . . . but then why should you
remember! . . .
Do you remember, a certain day,
Or evening rather,—spring evening long ago,—
We talked of death, and love, and time, and truth . . .
And said such wise things, things that amused us so . . .?
How foolish we were, who thought ourselves so wise!'—
And then we laugh, with shadows in our eyes.

MEDITATION ON A JUNE EVENING

I.

As evening comes, my thoughts turn back to you.
Darkness is slanting through the eastern streets.
The lamps are waiting. The wry-faced moon repeats
Her vain nocturnal pose.
The lovers loiter to choose their favourite seats.
Across the lamplit grass, a paper blows.
My thoughts turn back to you,
Like tired music in a tired brain
Seeking solution in the worn refrain;
It returns, it returns,
It climbs and falls, struggles, disintegrates,
Is querulous, resentful, states, restates;
But always, like one haunted, comes again
To that one phrase of pain;
And that one phrase, you know as well as I,
Is the remembered pallor of your face;
And a certain silence, and a certain sky,
And a certain place . . .

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

I know you'll say ' to think these things is useless; '
But music, then, is useless too.
Music persuades and captures the subtlest air . . .
As evening comes, my thoughts turn back to you.
Perhaps I misconceived you. You did not know—
How could you know? for none had ever told you—
That if you laughed or looked in such a way,
Letting the deep-seen challenge play
A shade too long,—letting it linger so
Like a glimpse of sky between the clouds,—
You did not know, we'll say,
That I should misinterpret this, believe
More meant than was intended; you did not know
That I would be so conscious of these things,
So desperately conscious, like one who clings
To the merest shade of meaning, shadow of tone . . .
And of course you would not wilfully deceive . . .

II.

You're leaning, I'll suppose, out of your window,—
Watching that moon swimming above the rooftops,
Slipping through restless boughs of trees;
You smile a little, as I have often seen you;
Smiling, because you know how nights like these,
With all that's sorrowful in them, and spacious, and gay,

Are foolish ripples which time will smooth away.
Your smile is bitter . . . I have tasted it . . .
It is the smile of one who secretly cries.
Yes, I remember it now, it is exquisite;
A passionate plea for all that dies,
Twisted to irony, tortured to silent pain . . .
You would like this night to come again;
You would like to hear this music played once more,—
To tease the secret out of a certain refrain,
To snare it among the outspread nerves, and see
What was its pleasure . . . And that refrain meant . . .
me? . . .

We have walked together against the evening sun,
Weaving with words a music for the flesh . . .
Your eyes deny me, that episode is done.

III.

I could indict you, oh, on many counts:
To watch the sunlit shallows of your eyes
Darken and deepen with surprise.
Raindrops, falling on water, are ringed with ripples:
Each perfect ring dilates and dies.
And so, though I might prove my charge against you,
My words would die upon you, like drops of rain,

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

You would as sweetly mirror the sky again . . .
It is no use to close my eyes, and say
'On such and such a day
Reading from such a book, on such a page,
Smiling, you leaned, and let your body rest
Trembling on mine, leaning your breast
Softly against my arm; until my veins
Cried out with music; it is no use, no use,
To say you could not know, you could not guess
That brush of your hand against my hand,
Touch of your dress,
Or dark eyes peering closely to understand,
Or idle question pitched in intimate tone,—
It is no use to say, if you had known
What death was in these things,
I should have not been spun in music, or caught
To stare, and question, and riddle the whole to nought . . .'
. . . Why do I say these words? You do not hear them.
Like ghosts of remembered music, they rise unsought.

You tell me you are sorry—and as you say it
Your caught voice breaks, you turn away from me,
But not too soon for me to see
One instant, in your eyes,
Far snow-peaks melting under sunny skies . . .
You tear a leaf, turn back to me and smile,

Remembering our youth. But this was strange,
This quiet change,
And as we talk, striving to seem at ease,
To ignore the ghost of love that walks between us,
Each little while
That look returns, I am like one who sees
A face somehow familiar, somehow strange,
Glimpsed in a crowd; who does not know
If it were seen before, or only dreamed,
Or who it is . . . Does pity tremble so? . . .
Or was it, after all, what all these musings
Have sought, like restless music, to approach,—
Regret, and self-reproach? . . .
And, if it were this, if it were really true
That you had teased your body with my presence,
Played upon me, that you might thereby play
Deep music on yourself . . . is this too late to say?
Is there still time? Could I yet capture you?
Would you admit you loved me, if you knew?
Was it a sign that I might yet demand,
Where asking was in vain? . . .
These things are difficult to understand:
This may be real, or a grotesque in my brain . . .
A grain of sand
May seem a desert, stared at long enough:
Eyes too intent see blots and parallels.
Tremendous heavens peal in a scale of laughter.
A sidelong smile divulges smoking hells . . .

IV.

It is strange, when all is done, when all our talk is done,
That of all these years only such trivial things
Should so live on . . . these foolish trivial themes,
Persisting and persisting,
Like the inconsequent words we say in dreams.
We sit at tea; a gesture of your hand,
Touches your throat, light gleams across your eyes;
In casual intimate tone I hear you say
'How odd that you should think to come to-day . . .
What prompted it, I wonder? '—the words return
Foolish, indeed, but old with mystery,
Precious, because, in spite of all, they live
And have some secret of you yet to give . . .
It is as if I visited once more
A house I lived in once, now tenantless;
Or walked in a glare of noon along a shore
Where as a boy I played . . . the rippled sands,
Pebbles wet with the tide,
Old grey boards, the purple vetch that crawls
Among dry matted weeds and shells and grass,
Bottles, and crooked sticks, and broken glass,
Beach plums and tumbled walls—
They are like ghosts returned by light of day,
I stare at them, I touch them with my hands,
And listen, to learn what secret it is they say . . .
And I remember, on a certain night . . .

MEDITATION ON A JUNE EVENING

It was raining . . . we heard the sound of rain . . .
And someone, some neighbour, was playing a violin,—
Playing the same thing over and over and over,
Remote, uneasy, like one who tries to explain,
Playing it into the flesh, playing it into the brain . . .
Why do these phantom hands, these faces, rise
Soon as I close my eyes?
I turn, but cannot escape, they follow me,
They beckon to me, the sad mouths open to speak,
The sad procession passes changelessly . . .
Someone, some neighbour, was playing a violin,
Playing the same tune over and over and over . . .
Will the quiet never begin? . . .

v.

The wry-faced moon goes leering up the sky.
The roofs are shiny, the fountain shoots and falls,
Against the stars, ringed with a ring of foam.
Inquisitive trees lean over the ghostly walls,
Glistening leaves like eyes
Fasten upon me to ask their ceaseless question.
My thoughts turn back to you
Like tired music in a tired brain
Seeking solution in the worn refrain;
It returns, it returns,

Climbs, and falls, struggles, disintegrates,
Is querulous, resentful, states, restates;
But always, like one haunted, comes again
To that one phrase of pain.
And that one phrase, you know as well as I,
Is the remembered beauty of your face,
And a certain silence, and a certain sky,
And a certain place.

DISCORD

The hurdy-gurdy sings in the golden morning;
In the hazy morning,
It sings to the budding trees, and creeps away.
Children take hands and play,
Sparrows whir upward from the dusty street;
But all that the music seems, somehow, to say
Is ' Death is hiding among the cherry blossoms :
The eyes of death look out through cherry blossoms;
Death's hand is on the bough and makes it sweet.'

In the quiet of morning,
The silver music plays among the trees;
It dances over the sunlit stones,
It is blown like rain, it is silent, it sings again,
It is scattered and spilled like petals upon a breeze . . .
The sunlight swirls and shatters in broad cascades,
But somehow all the music seems to sing
A sinister thing—

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That death is moving among the cool white blossoms,
Peering out through the blossoms with yellow eyes,
That the shadow of death is blue in the golden sunlight;
Blue in the sun it lies.

Over the cold fields and the cold new grass
Cloud-shadows silently blow and pass;
And the shadows of clouds are blue, of changing shape.
Shadows of trees are huddled by gusty wind,
They crouch, they hurry, they whirl, they half escape.
And as the music, stealing down cold air,
Creeps to the heart again,
To whisper a suddenly flowering pain :
The lover leans to her lover, and over his eyes
Sees something pass, something remote and blue,
Like a cold cloud silently blowing across cold skies . . .
And the music, rising on air, so slowly to drift away,
Like one grown tired at length, desiring rest,
Seems only to say
' Blue death is hiding among the cherry blossoms,
Parting the blossoms with white and silent hands,
To look at the world, and smile, and creep away.'

The snowdrops shake their bells against the grass.
The yellow crocus quivers and then is still.
But it is not the breeze that sets them nodding,
Not the wind, that makes them spill

DISCORD

The gliding silver raindrop in the sun :
It was the green and purple sinuous one,
It was the one with small red upward eyes;
Slowly breathing among the leaves he lies,
Slowly pushing against the delicate stems,
Drawing his silvered coils
Through tremulous clover and cinquefoils . . .
What was the echo heard, then, as we fled?
What was it the music said?
Something about a ghost that smiled through flowers,
A ghost who chilled us, a ghost of icy music,—
And cherry blossoms crowding to hide the dead.

1915 : THE TRENCHES

I.

All night long, it has seemed for many years,
We have heard the terrible sound of guns,
All night long we have lain and watched the calm stars.
We cannot sleep, though we are tired,
The sound of guns is in our ears,
We are growing old and grey,
We have forgotten many simple things.
Is this you? Is this I?
Will the word come to charge today? . . .
All night long, all night long,
We listen and cannot close our eyes,
We see the ring of violet flashes
Endlessly darting against the skies,
We feel the firm earth shake beneath us,
And all the world we have walked upon
Crumbles to nothing, crumbles to chaos,
Crumbles to incoherent dust;
Till it seems we can never walk again,

That it is foolish to have feet, foolish to be men,
Foolish to think, foolish to have such brains,
And useless to remember
The world we came from,
The world we never shall see again . . .
All night long we lie this way,
We cannot talk, I look to see what you are thinking,
And you, and you,—
We are all thinking, ' Will it come to-day? '
Get your bayonets ready, then—
See that they are sharp and bright,
See that they have thirsty edges,
Remember that we are savage men,
Motherless men who have no past . . .
Nothing of beauty to call to mind,
No tenderness to stay our hands . . .
. . . We are tired, we have thought all this before,
We have seen it all and thought it all,
Our thumbs are calloused with feeling the bayonet's edge,
We have known it all and felt it all
Till we can know no more.

II.

All night long we lie
Stupidly watching the smoke puff over the sky,

Stupidly watching the interminable stars
Come out again, peaceful and cold and high,
Swim into the smoke again, or melt in a flare of red . . .
All night long, all night long,
Hearing the terrible battle of guns,
We think we shall soon be dead,
We sleep for a second, and wake again,
We dream we are filling pans and baking bread,
Or hoeing the witch-grass out of the wheat,
We dream we are turning lathes,
Or open our shops, in the early morning,
And look for a moment along the quiet street . . .
And we do not laugh, though it is strange
In a harrowing second of time
To traverse so many worlds, so many ages,
And come to this chaos again,
This vast symphonic dance of death,
This incoherent dust.

III.

We are growing old, we are older than the stars :
You whom I knew a moment ago
Have walked through ages of silence since then,
Memory is forsaking me,
I no longer know
If we are one or two or the blades of the grass . . .

1915 : THE TRENCHES

All night long, lying together,
We think in caverns of dreadful sound,
We grope among falling boulders,
We are overtaken and crushed, we rise once more,
Performing, wearily,
The senseless things we have performed so often before.
Yesterday is coming again,
Yesterday and the day before,
And a million others, all alike, one by one,
Sulphurous clouds and a red sun,
Sulphurous clouds and a yellow moon,
And a cold drizzle of endless rain
Driving across them, wetting the barrels of guns,
Dripping, soaking, pattering, slipping,
Chilling our hands, numbing our feet,
Glistening on our chins.
And then, all over again, after grey ages,
Sulphurous clouds and a red sun,
Sulphurous clouds and a yellow moon . . .
I had my childhood once, now I have children,
A boy who is learning to read, a girl who is learning
to sew,
And my wife has brown hair and blue eyes . . .
Our parapet is blown away,
Blown away by a gust of sound,
Dust is falling upon us, blood is dripping upon us,
We are standing somewhere between earth and stars,
Not knowing if we are alive or dead . . .

All night long it is so,
All night long we hear the guns, and do not know
If the word will come to charge to-day.

IV.

It will be like that other charge—
We will climb out and run
Yelling like madmen in the sun
Running stiffly on the scorched dust
Hardly hearing our voices
Running after the man who points with his hand
At a certain shattered tree,
Running through sheets of fire like idiots,
Sometimes falling, sometimes rising.
I will not remember, then,
How I walked by a hedge of wild roses,
And shook the dew off, with my sleeve,
I will not remember
The shape of my sweetheart's mouth, but with other things
Ringing like anvils in my brain
I will run, I will die, I will forget.
I will hear nothing, and forget . . .
I will remember that we are savage men,
Motherless men who have no past,

Nothing of beauty to call to mind
No tenderness to stay our hands . . .

v.

We are tired, we have thought all this before,
We have seen it all, and thought it all.
We have tried to forget, we have tried to change,
We have struggled to climb an invisible wall,
But if we should climb it, could we ever return?
We have known it all, and felt it all
Till we can know no more . . .
Let us climb out and end it, then,
Lest it become immortal.
Let us climb out and end it, then,
Just for the change . . .
This is the same night, still, and you, and I,
Struggling to keep our feet in a chaos of sound.
And the same puff of smoke
Passes, to leave the same stars in the sky.

VI.

Out there, in the moonlight,
How still in the grass they lie,
Those who panted beside us, or stumbled before us,

Those who yelled like madmen and ran at the sun,
Flinging their guns before them.
One of them stares all day at the sky
As if he had seen some strange thing there,
One of them tightly holds his gun
As if he dreaded a danger there,
One of them stoops above his friend,
By moon and sun we see him there.
One of them saw white cottage walls
With purple clematis flowers and leaves,
And heard through trees his waterfalls
And whistled under the eaves;
One of them walked on yellow sand
And watched a young girl gathering shells—
Once, a white wave caught her hand . . .
One of them heard how certain bells
Chimed in a valley, mellow and slow,
Just as he turned to go . . .

VII.

All night long, all night long,
We see them and do not remember them,
We hear the terrible sounds of guns,
We see the white rays darting and darting,
We are beaten down and crawl to our feet,

1915 : THE TRENCHES

We wipe the dirt from mouths and eyes,
Dust-coloured animals creeping in dust,
Animals stupefied by sound;
We are beaten down, and some of us rise,
And some become a part of the ground,
But what do we care? we never knew them,
Or if we did it was long ago . . .
Night will end in a year or so,
We look at each other as if to say,
Across the void of time between us,
' Will the word come to-day? '

SONATA IN PATHOS

I.

Well, I am tired . . . tired of all these years,
The hazy mornings, the noons, the misty evenings,
Tired of the spring, tired of the fall;
The music starts again, I have heard it all,
I cannot escape, it whispers in my ears . . .
I have pursued you in so many places,
In a thousand times, with a thousand wistful faces,
I have pursued you so many times in vain . . .
Wherever I turn you rise in the shadows again,
Wherever I turn you are smiling there,
Touching the one white rose that stars your hair.
Why do you follow me, why do you seek me,
Why do you rouse strange music in my heart?
You laugh and enter the shadows and change once more,
You step transformed from a lamplit door,
You touch my arm and silently vanish away . . .
Why do you never stay? . . .
Only this afternoon, this rainy afternoon,
There, in the darkness, where I listened to music,

SONATA IN PATHOS

You came and sat beside me, with golden hair;
Were you the music itself, come to betray me?
For the music stopped, and you were no longer there;
And I sought in the darkness for you, and touched but darkness,
Reached out my hands and touched but air.
And suddenly, in the evening, you came again,
Sombre, in silver rain,
And drew the darkness about you, and the gleam of lights . . .
Where have you gone? Through what succession of nights
Must I pursue you from place to place
And face to face?
You are like music, forever moving and changing,
Forever weaving a lovelier melody . . .
You are like music, weaving and interweaving;
You plead and sing, but will not wait for me.
I have touched the moonlight whiteness of your hands,
I have walked with you by the moonlight sea,
We have sat and watched the waves slide up white sands,
The waves that whispered to you and me;
And the dark hair, the blue-black hair like midnight,
And the soft bright golden hair,
And the hair that ripples like sun on moving water,
And the hair that is lighter than melody on soft air,
I have known and touched them all, I have loved them all,

I have played a ghostly music upon them,
I have played a starlight magic upon them, and held them, and let them fall.
You, the white-breasted one who danced before me,
Bearing narcissus in your hands;
You with the mouth like jasper, you with the feet like snow . . .
I have loved you all, I have loved you long ago,
But you have faded before me, and left me nothing,
And the caress of hands, the lips, the sighs,
The starless night of darkened eyes,
White throats that filled with laughter,—
They have perished like music that leaves no echo after . . .
I cannot remember the softness of a kiss,
The fleeting warmth of a breath.
The evening falls, and brings me only this,—
The melancholy of some forgotten death.

II.

The naked elms that lift their writhing branches
In sinister patterns against the twilight sky,
They are monstrous corals in the coldness of an ocean;
And beneath them strange things creep and die.
I am tired, I have come a long way from the sun,

SONATA IN PATHOS

I have forgotten the wind on hills of blue.
I walk in the twilight, under strange black branches,
And try in vain to remember a face I knew.
My soul is green with cold sea-slime,
The slime of graceless lusts and awkward loves . . .
I would like to climb these frozen corals, climb
To the shining waves where a bright wind moves . . .
I would like to climb these cold black boughs, and see
A star above the waters . . . But can that be? . . .
You who have sought me, whom I have sought so often,—
Come down to me!
I would like to rise to a room where yellow candles
Shine in a golden row:
I would like to sit with you, and hear soft music
Intensely and persuasively flow . . .
I would like to hear you talking of simple things,
Of the leaves that hang on trees and softly fall:
I would like to have your hands touch mine like wings,
And see your face, so white and young and fragile,
Against the golden darkness of a wall . . .

III.

This is the picture of you who died so young—
You, whose dreams were the quietness of music,

Whose life was a music abruptly brought to an end.
I hold the candle above you, and search the shadows.
You would have been my friend, my more than friend.
I never saw you. But holding the candle above you,
Striving to find the secret that lights your face,
Something, some music, comes over me, and I love you,
I desire to touch you, I desire to change this place
From a room with candles, and a faded picture,
To a room with you, a living music, there,—
You, with the dark strange eyes and sombre depth of hair.
You, the clear-browed—what are you wondering of
That gives your innocent eyes the dusk of love?
What is the music dreaming behind your mouth?
Your lips are closed for a moment, you hold your breath,
Waiting for your first kiss, the mouth of death . . .
And your young body, your young white body, is dead;
And covered with earth; and turned to leaves; and fallen to earth again.
And the music you dreamed is gone. And your swift steps are gone.
And the wind blows over you; and the ghostly rain . . .
I will walk where you have walked, and think of you;
And search on the earth for the music that you knew . . .
Yes, you are one more whom I have sought in vain;
One who has beckoned to me and vanished away;
One who has gone and will not come again,
One who came, but would not stay.

Why must the music move? Why will it never rest?
Why will it never meet me, breast to breast?
Perhaps it is death alone whom I shall love,—
Death alone who will cling to me, never to let me move.

IV.

Slow steps pass in the evening . . . slow steps echo and pass,
Like my own steps returning from other years;
It is I, perhaps, pursuing the ghost of a dream,
A dream that will end in a laugh, or a dazzle of tears . . .
I would like to cry 'Come back!' but the steps are gone,
My ghost pursues its ghostly end.
It will pursue till the ghost is lost in the dawn;
It will pursue and dream till the stars ascend.
And the steps are woven gorgeously into a music,
A slow reverberant monotone:
I am weighed upon like one in a horrible fever:
I bear the weight of the stars alone.
And I must resurrect my dreams again,
Resurrect them all,
Endure them, like a tyrannous refrain,—
Obedient to their measures rise and fall . . .
I have touched the moonlight whiteness of your hands

And walked with you by a moonlight sea;
We have sat and watched the waves slide up white sands,
The waves that whispered to you and me.
And the dark hair, the blue-black hair like midnight,
And the soft bright golden hair,
And the hair that ripples like sun on moving waters,
And the hair that is lighter than melody on soft air,—
I have known and touched them all, I have loved them all,
I have played a ghostly music upon them,
I have played a starlight music upon them, and held them, and let them fall . . .

. . . Yet there are none who love me, and none I love;
And the mornings pass; and the noons; and the evenings die . . .
And I walk under freezing elms, whose branches writhe
Like tortured corals against a clear green sky.
And those who call me I follow; and those who leave me,
I shall remember till I die.

WHITE NOCTURNE

I.

The first soft snowflakes hovering down the night,
From one white cloud that hurries beneath the stars,—
Whispering over the black unfrozen pool,
Silently falling on withered leaves,
Eddying slowly among bare boughs of trees,—
The music you are to me is as ghostly as these,
Softly falling, softly passing,
Wandering slowly on dreamless air . . .
The first soft snowflakes slanting down this night
Melt on the lifted palms of your hands,
Or in the fragrant darkness of your hair . . .
One of them finds your lip, and you quietly laugh,
A laugh that means to say
' This was the kiss you gave me yesterday,
Or the ghost of it—ah yes, the ghost of it . . .
For the ghost of it is all we have to-day . . .'
The first slow snowflakes pass
Leaving a sprinkled whiteness on leaves and grass,

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

The cloud whirls ghostlike against the cold bright stars,
Over the long black boughs that seem to reach
Forlornly after it,
And now it is gone, and suddenly we seem
To walk in silence where before we walked in speech . . .
But the silence itself is exquisite,
Like a pause in music, ghostly with overtones,
And, silent, we seem to hear
The echoes of words we spoke and heard last year.
Clearly our footsteps sound on the moistened stones,
Clearly the lamplit hill-street gleams before us,
And silently we climb,
Climbing our tragic destiny together,
From lamp to lamp up the bright street of time.

II.

You sit beneath the lamp and talk to me,
With dark hair somehow turned to fire,
Your white hands lie in your lap, or touch your lips,
And your talk, like music, weaving intricately,
Plays upon me. It is a magic of white
Touching and changing all familiar things;
It flows in the windy night,
It quietly opens secret doors, it sings,

WHITE NOCTURNE

It returns upon itself, repeats, denies,
Or takes sweet pleasure in silence. And all the while
You sit beneath the lamp, and smile,
Or turn away your eyes.
We remember, you seem to say,—
Choosing strange words to say it, in another way,—
How slowly and how inevitably we change,
How what was then familiar now grows strange . . .
White valleys fall between us,
Your words become a wind, and heavily blow,
We seem to be crying across a chasm of snow,
Trying to hear the half-remembered words,
Trying to guess what we no longer know.
Yes, life changes, we are never the same . . .
Your eyes grow dark with a tiny flame,
You say the words, and wait,
And a sudden terror seizes me, for I fear
That you have divined the things that I have forgotten,
Things that still shine before you white and clear.
Yes, it is strange . . . You sigh, your talk flows on,
You touch your hair with your hands, and sigh,
And suddenly then it seems to me that this word,
This word so quietly said, was a terrible cry . . .
And I am confused, I desire to touch your hand,
But again white chasms open, the night flows chill,
And something freezes within me, and I am still.

III.

The snowflakes tick the frosted windowpane,
The night is mad with the senseless dance of flakes,
The coal fire sinks and shakes;
And I wait by the window, and look along the street,
To where in the snow, beneath a lamp,
A man and a woman stand:
He is leaning close to her face, he takes her hand,
He pleads with her, she tries to turn away . . .
What is it he leans to say?
What is the savage music he plays upon her?
What chords profound with memories?
He takes her in his arms, and she is his,
She lifts her face in the sombre light,
And together, slowly, they walk away
Whirled about by the mad dance of snow;
Down the white silent street from lamp to lamp they go,
Into the immortal night.
Where have they gone? Where will the white streets lead them?
To what tempestuous or ignoble end?
To what faint peace, or dazzling pain?
The snowflakes whirl and madden my brain,
They whirl in patterns before my eyes . . .
And I see them at last in a small and sombre room,
In the yellow lamplight I see them rise;

She smiles, and lifts white hands to touch her hair:
And he waits wearily in the eternal chair.

IV.

I would like to touch this snow with the wind of a dream,
With a sudden warmth of music, and turn it all
To petals of roses . . . Why is it that I recall
Your two pale hands holding a bowl of roses,
Wide open like lotos flowers, floating in water?
I would like to touch this snow with the wind of a dream;
To hold the world in my hands and let it fall.
We have walked together through snow for a long long way,
We have walked among the hills immortally white,
Golden by noon and blue by night.
I would like to touch this snow with the wind of a dream:
And hear you singing again by a starlight wall . . .

V.

You talk to me—what is it that you are saying?
April . . . April . . . the soft sun falls between,
The deep white chasm, the gorge of the frozen river,

Flashes with white and green;
And we are walking there by the blue river,
By the blue river scaled with golden fire,
Our feet move pace for pace through the tall grasses,
And the earth is light with desire.
Youth . . . youth . . . so sing we for a space . . .
And darkness comes over your face,
A great cloud crosses the golden sky,
Wind shakes the leaves, you fall in the grass and cry;
Crying silently, hiding your face with your hands.
Youth . . . youth . . . so sing we for a space,
And you are crying, I know,
Because this day, this youth, this beauty, must go,
Go down into the dust.
The golden river is dark with a sudden gust,
The green of the willows is ruffled grey,
A great cloud crosses the sky,
Wind shakes the leaves, you fall in the grass and cry.
Youth . . . April . . . we clamour to them to stay,
And a shadow is on us, for we know that love must die.
And rising, then, we see white peaks in the distance . . .
White peaks . . . quiet . . . peace . . . eternity.

VI.

Do you remember, you who smile at me,
Under this lamp, here in this world of snow,

WHITE NOCTURNE

Do you remember, long ago . . .
What was I going to tell you? What was my dream
to be?
It does not matter; for all we need to say
To strike our hearts to a bitter-chorded music
Is 'do you remember . . . on a certain day . . .'
And all the years fall down from us like leaves,
And all this sinister world is blown away.
Take my hand and dream of youth once more,
Take my arm, and let us walk
On the wet flagstones gleaming yellow with lamps,
And along the sea-furled shore;
Or up a certain flight of marble stairs,
Resting our hands on the green-veined balustrade,
And into a room where a low-toned waltz is played,
And women rise from gilded chairs.
Ah, this has been a golden day,—
You lean and say,—
A day like music of strange rich involutions,
Swift and profound and huddled and sweet . . .
The wind of it blows even into this room,
There is a hint of forests in this rich gloom . . .
You smile, your eyes intensely darken at mine,
I feel the music about us heavily beat,
Waver and vanish and shine.
One white rose with a golden heart—
Held in the cup of your hand—
To-day, I muse, all things will find solution,

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

The universe is simple to understand.
Take my arm, and let us drift
Like leaves when the wind is driven; for the day soon ends.
It is strange how such a day, with such a music,
And one white rose, will make friends more than friends.

VII.

White hours like snow, white hours like eternal snow . . .
Long white streets jewelled with lights . . .
Our steps are muffled and silent, we scarcely know
How swiftly we cross the nights.
I would like to touch this snow with the fire of a dream,
With the mouth of a dream. And turn it all
To petals of roses . . . I would like to touch you, too,
And change you into the chord of music I knew.
Can you not change? . . . Run back again to April?
Laugh out at me from among young lilac leaves? . . .
Play with your jewels, and sing!
Feeling the earth beneath you float with spring! . . .
You talk in an even tone, I answer you;
And all about us seems to say
Peace . . . peace . . . the hills and streets are cold.
You are growing old.

WHITE NOCTURNE

VIII.

Yes, we have changed, slowly and silently changed;
We are the hungry ghosts of the selves we knew;
We sit on each other's tombs and stare at death,
We are not lovely, we scarcely believe it true,—
And only then with a pang that is almost a cry,—
That once, long ago, we were the I and the you
Who shivered in music under an April sky.
White night of snow, and a thousand nights like this;
Snow on our lips like the ghost of a kiss;
And a thousand nights in a hollow second of time
We will return again,
Silently, or with trivial speech, to climb
From lamp to lamp up the white street of pain.
Yet, is it better, you say,
Painfully turning your darkened eyes away,
To lend our souls to a quieter music at last,—
Remembering, when we will,
The sudden and gorgeous clashings of the past? . . .
Snow falls about us, the hills immortally white
Wait far off in the undisturbing night.

1917

NOCTURNE IN A MINOR KEY

I.

I will say : I walked alone in whistling darkness.
Or heard a rush of rain through windless air.
Or stood in dust with yellow leaves around me.
Or dreamed I saw a sea-maid comb her hair.
But why recite these things? You will not hear me,
Or if you heard me, would not care.

I will say : I saw a sea-gull crossing water,
Or suddenly in the midnight heard a cry.
Or woke from sleep to hear the green leaves rustle.
Or saw bright windows in a misty sky.
I will say, I walked alone, and heard none call me;
You will not care, nor ask me why . . .

These are the notes whereof my life makes music.
These are the hurrying notes of pain

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

That whirl like windy papers under street-lamps,
Blown through the spacious darkness of my brain.
I will say : these things are trifles, yet they kill me.
Shall we rehearse our play again?

Be patient, press your palm against my heartbeats,
Reverse my heart like an hour-glass,
And watch the downward sifting of my minutes
Until the time when I must pass . . .
You shall have heard, at least, a poignant music
And seen futility;
You will know better than to weep for me.

I.

I am the one—since I must now confess it—
Who came too late, and found all windows dark.
I am the one who sat on dew-wet benches
And watched the fountain in the deserted park.
I am the one who walked in a grass-grown street
Hearing no sound save my own feet.
I saw the darkness rising like a wall.
I heard old stars chime out and crack and fall.
I turned to the east and saw it red and grey,
Saw lovely faces blown like leaves away.
I heard slow waves of music lapse to silence,
And wished to speak, yet had no word to say.

NOCTURNE IN A MINOR KEY

I am the one whom ancient spring returning
With sound of leaves could not assuage.
I am the one who found your pity heartless,
Yet could not rail at you, nor rage.
You loved me once, you love me now no longer . . .
Must I take kindness for my daily wage?

III.

I will say : I walk involved in webs of darkness,
Across my face feel filaments of shadows,
Yet hear you laugh, and seek for you.
You have withdrawn your golden-chorded beauty.
Shall I not somewhere find the love I knew?

I will say : I walk at night in crowded places
And search for a perfumed secret in white faces,
And dream by night of faces seen by day.
Or climb dark stairs and in a dark room's fragrance
Play such a music as pleas of rain might play.
The silver talons tear my heart to beauty,
The silver talons flash and tear . . .
Petals fall to the grass, and in that darkness
I see you passing there,
Smiling at me as if for one behind me,
Smiling at death, perhaps, who waits behind me,
Lifting a conscious hand to loose your hair.

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

Will you not stay, or, if you go, return?
My heart grows tired, the music ends.
I will walk alone, implore my veins to silence,
Or talk of casual things with casual friends.
Or sit on a dew-wet bench in the park, recalling
Laughter and speech, and silence, and think my musings
Are like that quiet fountain, quietly falling:
Flung from a starless darkness, flung in vain
To fall in a mournful whiteness back again.

IV.

The green-leaved bough leans down above my head,
The pale green leaves, with the lamplight on them shed,
Twinkle on delicate stems, whisper a little,
Tremble on breathless air.
The green-leaved bough leans down towards its image
Of twinkling leaves in the water there . . .
And I am a prey to trifles of no moment,
Caught in a snare of circumstance,
I laugh for a foolish laughter, weep for sorrow,
For every whim of the music bow and dance:
Twinkle with leaves, and flow and fall with water,
Lean with the leaning bough in arrested pain;
Die and am born again.
These are the thousand things by which I seek you,
The atoms of dust that fall and break my brain.

NOCTURNE IN A MINOR KEY

v.

Say then : I see too much, and you too little.
You lean and laugh above the applauding music,
While I, apart, hear silence between the tones.
For you, there is no falling, save of petals;
For me, apart, the silences fall like stones.
How could we dance, then, to the self-same music,
Who see so much, so little? I do you wrong
If I reproach you, call you too contented,
Too quick to thrill to a sentimental song.
Walk, then, among your tulips, turn your eyes,
Caress with a careful hand your jewelled hair,
Discern the flashing of wings in empty skies,
Pause for effect upon your marble stair . . .
And I will not reproach you, blaming only
The sinister glittering chaos of our time,
Through which, forever, lonely walks with lonely,—
The lover, ridiculous; the loved, sublime.

EPISODE IN GREY

I.

So, to begin with, dust blows down the street,
In lazy clouds and swirls, and after that
Tatters of paper and straws, and waves of heat,
And leaves plague-bitten; under a tree a cat
Sprawls in the sapless grass, and shuts his eye.
And sitting behind closed shutters you hear a beat
Of melancholy steps go slowly by,
See crooked rays of shadows reeling,
Fantastic fever shapes, across your ceiling;
And in the enormous silence that ensues
You think how dusty and limp the green leaves hang,
Or hear a bell shake out its hourly news
In clang on languid clang.
And time and sky, those items of our lives,
Seem but as windlestraws
In the gigantic vortex of our hearts:
We move, we change, we hesitate, we pause,
In tune with vast self-generating laws;
The hour predestined comes; predestined it departs.

EPISODE IN GREY

II.

And after days of dust have swirled and gone,
And sparrows arch their wings in the meagre shade,
When the late tulips have wilted on their stems,
And even by the pool's rim the grasses fade,
Then, after all, but now perhaps too late,
The long-expected clouds mount up again . . .
Yes, we have had too long to wait:
There is no assuagement in the sound of rain.
We hear its pleasure among the leaves,
We hear its liquid parting from the eaves,
We look, and in each other's eyes
See lost illusions and answerless questions rise.
You light the lamp, and with your nerveless hands
Thrust your gleaming needle and draw your strands
Of lilac through pale silk . . . You lower your head,
And you are silent, and for all I know
You wish this time had never come, that somehow it might go,
Or even—as I wish too—that we were dead.
We are agreed. And though we say no word,
We read each other's veins, profoundly know
The tedium of a tune too often heard,
Too much rehearsed . . . We heard it come and go,
We played our parts with such pathetic care,
I the accompaniment and you the air,
Reversed our roles, with chord and discord chiming,

Suspension slowly to resolution climbing,—
Yet somehow, through no fault of you or me,
Drew out the affair too long, only to learn
Our sweet musicianship could only earn
A tardy kindness, sad futility.
Did you delay too long your acquiescence,
Surrendering only when desire was dead?
Did I persuade too long, command too seldom?
No answer shall be said,
There is no need for answer, for we know
When we first drew together, with slow steps,
Assaying and presaging with sure eyes,
It was predestined so.

III.

And now, you say, we cannot move apart . . .
The minutes, the hours, the days we wove together
In a mesh of pain have bound us, heart to heart:
We strain in a tender hatred, wondering whether
The hurt we do will hurt the other more,
Or more ourselves . . . We move in a close-linked pain,
And stretch, and feel soft anguish at the core,
And praise each other the while our eyes complain.
We should have seen the coming of this day.
We should have known that two such lives as ours,
Such lives of ruined cities, crumbled houses,

Perspectives of black ruins fouled with flowers,
Could not be brought together without probings . . .
We should have known the day must come at last
When we should see the alluring present crumble
Among the horrible slag-heaps of the past.
Too old we were at heart, and too accomplished
In pause and counter-pause, and feigned confusion;
Too skilfully we played, too well responded,
Too calmly saw and weighed the veiled allusion:
And yet, for all our wisdom, could not see
Where all was certainty no love could be.
We have deceived ourselves, but not each other:
Pretending love for what we could not love,
Now in a love of ghosts we are bound together
And struggle and cry and rage, and cannot move.

IV.

Shall we be honest then, and tear apart? . . .
Your hands lie limp, you hear rebukes and pleadings,
And a soft fiery tearing in your heart
Presages sleepless nights, imagined bleedings . . .
No, we have grown together: every motion,
In laugh, and look, and question and reply,
Since first we met and joined in this deception,
More subtly fused our brains, till 'you' and 'I'
Are mere abstractions, interchangeable,

And death to one is death to both.
We hate each other tenderly and well,
We think of partings and are nothing loth,
Our kissings are a fanged and poisonous thing;
And we should strike more bitterly, did we know
The pain would not return; and so we cling
In desperate heartlessness, and cannot go . . .
Two perfect lovers snared in a single snare!—
Snared in a love of making love too well.
Our music sweeps us on, we know not where,
We are sliced with violin, and stabbed with bell,
And cannot end what we ourselves have started;
Mad with desire we seize and crush and tear,
Only to find it is ourselves we torture,
Playing a dissonance which we cannot bear.
You are not she I passionately made love to,
Nor am I he you cunningly adored.
The overtones we thought we heard were echoes,
The lily we thrust our hands to is a sword.

v.

After long days of dust we lie and listen
To the silvery woven harmonies of rain,
Your eyes look past me, dark with pain,
You think how the thin leaves thrill and drip and glisten,

And touch my hair with your hand . . . We should be
wise,—
The tremor of your body seems to say,—
If like these leaves we forgot the dusty day;
And closed our eyes,
And took what passion gives, without complaining
That love is not our lot.
Steadily falls the rain, all night it will be raining,
And we shall sleep, and know it not.
This hand that touches me is not the hand
Of the silver queen I dreamed of, nor these lips
The red lips of the cool white-hearted nereid . . .
Passion comes over us with its dark eclipse.

VI.

And so, to end with—who shall say the end?
Who first will break this compact—you or I?
This much we know—it must be done abruptly,
No soft preludic speech, no sudden cry,
No murderously indifferent glance of eye . . .
But some day one of us, grown half possessed
With pain unbearable, will walk away
Into the emptiness of time he came from,
Saying no word, since there's no word to say.

1915

INNOCENCE

I.

By candle-light he read till late.
A wild wind creaked the garden gate.
And when at last he closed his book
And ran the curtain up, to look
At the sinister sky, against the pane
Came sharp the first few drops of rain,
And a lightning flame cleft hard the night
Lighting the trees with swift blue light.
Was youth not lightning-flame like this? . . .
And would not striking so be bliss? . . .
The rain-drops paused, then faster fell,
The murmur of raindrops seemed to swell,
Filling the dark with unseen grief,
Falling on roof and bough and leaf;
While lightning-stabs ran ceaselessly
Out of the darkness into the sea.
He heard the night-wind gustily roar
Among the trees. Along the shore,
Sullen and slow, in lull of squall,
He heard the short waves rush and fall,

And nearer at hand the patter on leaves
And the heartless drip of drops from eaves.
These minute-drops, it seemed they meant
That youth went as the minutes went,
Falling forever, as all things must,
Into the grey and dreamless dust.
Why was he not at sea out there,
Fighting the wildness in this air?
Would he be always chained to soil,
Condemned, year after year, to toil
With hoe and harrow, seed and plough?
This hand that held this candle now,
Must wither, and pass, among these meadows . . .
He turned the flame. A riot of shadows
Flew round the walls. And he knew then
That he must go, live, laugh, with men,—
With men who rode through nights like this
For a paltry flag or a woman's kiss.

He puffed the flame out, threw it by,
And listened quiet; while the sky
Blazed white with lightning one brief space
And trees and sea leapt towards his face.
Blackness came back. The room was still.
He opened the window. Over the sill,
Into the tumult of the storm,
He stepped and felt the rain-drops, warm,

INNOCENCE

On face and shoulders teeming thick
While lightnings glimmered quiet and quick.
At the garden gate he paused, looked back,
Saw all the cottage windows black,
Then, facing slants of gusty rain,
And breathing salt air keen as pain,
Went forth, a man, to meet his earth
With a young and hard and savage mirth.

Along the beach, a mile to town,
He ran with dripping face bent down,
The drops came fast, he scarce could breathe,
He heard them whisper and hiss and seethe
On the flattened blackness of this sea
That washed up towards him mournfully.
To-night, for the first time, life was sweet!
These waves that whitely round his feet
Spread sly and sibilant, like pale hands
Reaching in darkness over the sands,
These were his old days yearning still
To lure him down to dark and kill;
And speeding through them, tireless, strong,
His young heart burst with a triumph-song,
He fled like fire, he was free at last,
He rose like a swift wind from his past.

O youth of laughter, youth of fire,
Youth tremulous with bright desire,

Welcoming sun, laughing at rain,
Making a brightness out of pain,
Weaving of dreams a lovely earth
With heart of sunlight, soul of mirth :
Speed to the sun, to that great blaze,
To light therein your glorious days.

By the old stone bridge he met a van,
And there at last his life began.
A smoky lantern gleamed behind,
He shouted, ran toward it blind,
And a dark-eyed girl leaned out to him,
Her lovely young face shadowed dim.
She bade him in to shelter there,
And talking with him combed her hair,
While rain whirred on the canvas roof,
And they heard the tramp and plash of hoof.
As far as the second town, she said,
The van would go; she shook her head,
Making the black hair flow and fall,
And tossed it back, while sweet and small
Her mischievous face looked out through it,
Like a hidden fire, most exquisite;
And seeing her eyes burn through that dark,
Each like a golden blowing spark,
His hands grew hot, his young heart beat,
He thought this woman was strangely sweet,

INNOCENCE

A dangerous red flame fierce in smoke,
And his young voice trembled when he spoke.
Meanwhile his eyes, with hungry stare,
Fed at the miracle of her hair;
And her white hand that moved so slow,
Combing the long hair to and fro,
Drew to a rhythmical delight
His young blood innocent till that night.
Behind her head a lantern hung,
A small red flame, wherefrom were flung
Goblin shadows to spin and sprawl
On canvas roof and canvas wall;
And while she combed these shadows went
Dizzily, silently, blurred and blent,
Came out, shrank back, and swiftly fled,
At lift of her arm or toss of head.
She laughed, to watch his bashful stare:
Had he seen no woman comb her hair?—
She drew it out and coiled it then
To heap up on her head again;
Between her lips she held each pin
Till place was found to push it in,
Yet, holding them, could, every while,
Manage, in spite of them, to smile.
And when she smiled her sweetness came
Through all his flesh like gusty flame,
Rich dissolution, sharp and sweet,
Making his full heart pause, to beat,

Before it hurried to keep in time
With measured rain, a delicate chime.
Backward, it seemed, on all his days
She shed from her heart a windy blaze,
And all that once had pained him so,
Somehow, in that bewitching glow,
Grew beautiful and far and strange;
He felt his buried childhood change
And blossom in him and grow fair
As if it fed on magic air;
And all his grey fields seemed once more
Gardens by an enchanted shore,
Where dew-wet daisies gleamed in sun
And earth seemed always just begun,—
Just risen, with a laughing face,
From the great fount of stars in space . . .
Life was a many-musicked dream,
A mystic woof of dust and gleam,
And on these musics came and went
Visions out of the darkness sent,
Faces and voices merged in one,
Cool green earth and blazing sun . . .
Were he and she, and all their world
Only a golden dust-mote, whirled
In a shaft of fire that fell between
Two darknesses, a moment seen? . . .
Time caught him up and fled with him,
His childhood whirled away, grew dim . . .

And she, being gypsy, took his palm
To peer therein for good or harm,
In changing light, with changing eyes,
And virgin brow grown sagely wise.
Love of glory was here foretold—
Glory his hands would never hold;
His life was little and bright and brief,
Soon to be withered, like a leaf . . .
He laughed, but let his hand lie there;
Feeling against his cheek her hair,
So soft; and when she stirred her head
It touched, withdrew, and touched, and spread
A luxury, like blossoming,
Smouldering rose and flashing wing,
Through all his heart: and down his veins,
Over the seething of these rains,
Golden horns in his blood were blown,
Prolonged and sweet in golden tone,
Faint and clear, a far-off laughter,
Sinister, deep, and sad; and after
A silence came in which rain fell,
In which he heard her slowly tell
Of youth, more fleeting bright than breath,
Love unfulfilled, and life, and death.
What meant she? These were word and word:
Not life, not dream. Her voice he heard,
And that was like a music, flowing
Smooth as fire, sweetly slowing,

Subtle, persuasive, a command
Upon his heart; and still his hand
Lay in her hand, and still she sought
His web therein with puzzled thought.
He smiled. And did she, then, believe
A destiny these lines could weave
To hide such portent of disaster?
No, of his own life he was master;—
Although she called him evil-starred.
After a lightning flash came hard
The rush of rain along the roof,
Drowning the tramp and splash of hoof.
Smiling, serene, she dropped his palm,
And touched her hair again; and calm,
With half-averted musing face,
One elbow raised in conscious grace,
And vague, deep-seeing, darkened eyes
Like starless space in starred blue skies,
Fed at his soul, until it seemed
That in those depths he shrank and dreamed,
Was of her life some tiny part
Which had flowed upward from her heart . . .
And pondering on her living face,
Her eyes half closed, he thought a space
That life ere this he never knew;
Only this time, this place, were true,
Only this moment was abiding;
All else illusion swiftly gliding.

Or were these eyes a dream? . . . But no:
Naught could be life, more truly so;
And mirrored in him, as in a glass,
This lovely face would never pass.

The van was jolting into town,
And into the darkness he jumped down.
A smoky lantern gleamed behind,
The rain came thick, it beat him blind,
And a dark-eyed girl leaned out to him,
Her lovely young face shadowed dim.
'Good-night!' Her words were lost in rain,
He peered, but could not see her plain.
Only, a hand through lamplight came
Which touching his hand thrilled like flame;
And dark-starred eyes and shadowy cheek
So smote him he could hardly speak.
'Good-night!'—Her words were lost in rain.
And in his heart great bells of pain
Opened and beat and fell and beat
While dark he ran with eyeless feet.

II.

Rain on the roof above him drummed;
Soft rain through all his pulses hummed;

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

Water returning to the sea
Out of the night's immensity.
How often had this rain been heard,
And he had understood no word!
But now like music's own self, weaving
Delicate measures past conceiving,
With sibilant whisper, windy whir,
It talked of her, it sang of her,
Mimicked her laughter, feigned her speech,
Till through the night he yearned to reach
And find if in impalpable air
His fingers might not touch her hair.
This girl was sweet. He had not known
A soul could be so rose-like blown . . .
Outside his window, by the eaves,
Murmurous, glib, he heard the leaves
Drinking the raindrops gleefully
In green and secret revelry.
Strange! through all his life till now,
Watching the soil and the slow plough
That tore the matted roots apart,
He had not dreamed that earth's deep heart
In slowly sunward yearning bliss
Could send up such a rose as this!—
The soil was sweet that did such things;
This clod had sent up sunlit wings . . .
He closed his eyes, and in that place
Summoned the cool light of her face,

And her cool hand beneath his own,
And her low voice's silver tone.
Sweeter than music was this voice :
Sweet as when violins rejoice
In complex mood, to single time,
And delicate concords fall and climb :
There was a plangent tremble here
Which troubled sweet the spirit's ear . . .
Yet was it true, what she had said,—
And were the stars so easily read,
And could his life be swayed afar
By malign lustre of some star?—
No, this was dreaming; young and strong,
He would fashion all his days to song,
And walk in sunlight with sure feet.
The rain hurried . . . The warm rain beat . . .
Through his veins in gusts it went.
And listening dark he thought it meant
Music bearing among earth's roots
Dreams of blossoms and of fruits,
Petals conceived in darkling sod
By which the soil might look on God.

Between his eyelids vague shapes gleamed,
A light sleep fell, he turned and dreamed.
. . . In sinister dusk by sea they walked,
On weeded shingle sat and talked :

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

A light wind whirled her soft white dress,
It tossed her hair, her loveliness
Blew over him like gusts of fire,
Dizzying him with mute desire . . .
The surf lunged, hissing, at their feet . . .
And laughing upward to him, sweet,
In mock of fear she drew away
From a sliding foam-sheet gleaming grey.
The sun broke free from clouds a space,
Warming the youngness of her face;
Across grey leagues of hurrying sea
He shot pale fire; then, ominously,
Dipped whirling into the rack again,
And night fell swiftly, scattering rain.
She laughed, put out her hand to rise,
Letting her dark eyes seek his eyes,
And for a moment, so, stood still;
And suddenly, then, youth had his will,
He kissed her mouth, she leaned to him,
Rain and the sea grew far and dim,
He only knew he touched her face,
They two alone in time and space.
He kissed her small, sweet, shutting eyes,
And felt her young breast quiver and rise,
Soft on his cheek her soft hair blew,
Sea-gulls above them cried and flew,
And over the cliffs came faintly down
Three bell-notes from the wind-blown town . . .

Chaos of tone . . . The bell-notes came
Flaring within his heart like flame,
Clashed and mingled and pulsed and roared,
Molten upon him fused and poured,
Opened and beat and fell and beat
While dark he ran with eyeless feet . . .

He woke. Faint tremble of a bell
Sang in his ears. The rain still fell.
And rising in the darkness there
It seemed he felt her windy hair
Cool on his eyes, and still it seemed
He kissed this mouth, more real than dreamed . . .
Fantastic fires within him blent,
And into the rain, half-dazed, he went :
Dropped down the path that led to sea,
And through the darkness, passionately,
Sought for the whiteness of her dress,
Her glimmering phantom loveliness.
This was the place—or was it this?
He heard on the sea the slow rain hiss.
She was not here . . . A dream, no more . . .
He watched the pale surf charge the shore,
Watched the wild combers plunge and sprawl
And helpless shingle rolling crawl
Giddily down the undertow . . .
Into this great sea he would go,

And fight these savage waves a space,—
A song of praise for her young face.

He watched his chance, and stooped, and dove.
Darkness above him whelmed and drove.
He fought, three huge waves crashed him down;
He felt that he must breathe or drown;
Her face went past him, days and nights;
He caught at a whirl of blinding lights;
Black depths beneath him burst in moons,
Bells in the water beat in swoons,
He swallowed fire, he strangled flame,
Then darkness and a swift dream came.

. . . He walked with loud steps on hard sand.
Bright seas foamed up on either hand,
Hissing a threat of death to him.
Before him, far, and fading dim,
A green-treed world lay low and sweet
Towards which he moved his tired feet.
Among the tall trees lights came out,
Someone was running, he heard a shout,
And a face that he had loved somewhere
Leaned out beneath a lantern there.
She smiled, he reached his hands to her,
Darkness came down, he heard wings whir,

INNOCENCE

A sudden music, intense and sweet,
Broke in the air, and vanished fleet.
He hurried, he felt a creeping dread,
Hurried, and dared not turn his head.
He walked with loud steps on hard sand,
Bright seas foamed up on either hand;
He felt their cold and sparkling breath
Exhale upon him a wind of death,
The low green shore grew vague and far,
One light remained,—or was it star?—
And now the darkness drank this down,
He saw no more of shore or town,
Only this tongue of hard wet sand
And black waves foaming on either hand.
Where was the earth? It could not be
That everything was sunk in sea?
Along this darkening shore he drove
A monstrous plough, the bright share clove
A rich brown loam, a fruitful earth,
He flung fine seed, and a flame of mirth,
A fire of roses, white and red,
Wavered and shot behind his tread,
Shone and glistened and fanned and gleamed:
With time, these seas could be redeemed . . .
But darkness again destroyed it all,
The vast low sky began to fall,
A blackness sagged upon his brain,
Crushed, in a blood-red cloud of pain,

Flattened him down on hard cold sand
While bright seas rushed on either hand.
Remote within him a sweet voice spoke,—
Something was lost! Rich music broke,
The two seas rose and gleamed to meet,
Hissed over sand, made sea complete,
They roared together, they drowned the world,
A ghostly vapour above them whirled,
Drifted away, blew off, blew far,
Leaving a darkness without star:
Was it the world, or was it he,
That blew away so peacefully? . . .

III.

The waves hurried, the long seas flowed,
Out of the night in hosts they rode,
Seething and sinister and swift,
Each, in its destined place to lift
A darkening crest against pale sky,
Glimmer, unfurl, and dazzle high
In a shatter of foam along this shore,
Withdrawing slow with solemn roar.
Who shall declare where they began?
All night from west to east they ran.
All night, a terrible music sung,
Unwearying on the cliffs they flung,—

INNOCENCE

Rose and beat, to fall in beating,
Greyly and endlessly repeating.
Who shall declare what hurt they did,
What murder among the rocks they hid?
Cruel and beautiful they came;
And offered, without pride or shame,
The naked body, gashed and white,
Of him who wooed the stars that night.

1914

DUST IN STARLIGHT

Strange music filled his ears that night:
The wind blew long: in ceaseless white
The soft snow ticked his window-pane,
And turned to sleet, and turned to rain;
And all night long he listened there
To the wild merriment in the air,
And thought it strange that there should be
Such fury-driven night, while he
Lay in an anguish, stretched and torn,
Eyes wide with pain, unclosed, forlorn,
Moveless upon his narrow bed,
Tense fingers clenched beneath his head . . .
The snow upon the sill piled dim . . .
Did not this storm rise out of him? . . .
And then the sleet, in gusty flaws,
Pattered the panes, and in each pause
He heard his heart's slow tortured beating,
Wearily through the veins repeating
Pain and pleasure, pain and pleasure,
Life's simple, senseless, tireless measure.

Snow turned to sleet, sleet turned to rain.
He lived his whole life through again.
And while the tortured elm-boughs moved
Against the eaves, once more he loved
This woman, she, the golden-haired,
For whom first love had been declared.
He closed his eyes, closed out the storm.
The air came fragrant, stealing warm :
Pregnant with lilacs, shaking sweet
Their purple crowns along the street;
While he, his young soul turbulent,
Under the stars through dark streets went,
Filled with a subtle fiery mirth,
Conscious of all the moving earth,—
The flagstones ringing sweet and hard,
The shadowy river mooned and starred,
The lovely lamplit maple trees,
Luminous green, where through the breeze
Softly rustled, twinkling leaves,
And moving the shadows under the eaves.
The church-bells pealed a languid eight :
He quickened pace, lest he be late.
Music from all the dark earth came,
The whole world seemed to bloom with flame,
And his young body ran like song
While rapidly he walked along.
Remote, the bell rang : faint and fleet :
With his own heart the vast night beat :

And then, behind the glass door, she,
Far lovelier than a dream could be,
With smiling lips and grave shy eyes,
So beautiful, so warm, so wise,
Came subtly timid, subtly proud,
Making his pulses push and crowd
And clamour and cry, while with slow hand,
Smiling, she drew the latch, to stand,
Against the wall, whole leagues away,
Shrinking and sweet, no word to say . . .
Snow turned to sleet, sleet turned to rain.
Why must he give himself such pain?
Why hark back now to what was dead?
He clenched moist hands beneath his head;
And then, in sudden agony,
Relaxed in sudden misery,
Turned on his face, let fall the years,
And eased his heart with birth of tears.
Why, if he no more loved her now,
Was it such torment, thinking how
She smiled, or spoke, in years gone by?
Why think how he had made her cry,
This time or that, with cruel word?
Sharp through the years her sob he heard,
Slight as a breath, a terrible thing,
And saw her hands repel and cling,
And, fugitive, her eyes, dark blue,
Brim bright with sudden tears, where through

She looked from infinite distances,
Beseeching gaze fixed deep on his;
Then sentences that broken came,
Dissolving him in flaming shame . . .
If he had loved her so much then,
Could he not love her so again?
Her mouth seemed sweet to him a space:
The childish sweetness of her face:
Her soft gold hair; and thinking this
His throat filled, and he yearned to kiss
This face that he had loved, and so,—
Listening to the tick of snow,
And all the silence, else, that lay
Through all the house,—he groped his way
To the dark windy fragrant room,
Now strange to him, and in that gloom
Stood motionless beside her bed;
She slept, one arm above her head;
And strangely tired this young face seemed,
And sad, as if some grief she dreamed.
He stooped, and touched her forehead then,
And seemed to live dead love again,
With troubled heart; and once more went,
Not knowing well what these things meant,
To his own room to lie and stare
Through the black turmoil of the air;
While snow turned sleet, and sleet turned rain,
And through his heart, and through his brain,

Wild storm went whirling, mad carouse,
Tearing at roofs and breaking boughs,
And strewing with havoc all the earth;
A terrible and a grievous mirth . . .

Dawn came, pale twilight over snows.
He could not sleep. And so he rose,
And dressed unconsciously, and crept
Past the dark room where still she slept,
And down the stairs, and through the hall.
He would put end, now, to it all.
Put end?—Not die, he did not mean?
Well, why not die?—The snow, unseen,
Spread white around him, muffling thick;
Eyes down he strode, his pace grew quick,
Down the long silence of the hill
To the black stream, unfrozen still.
Swollen it was. Black eddies coiled,
Over hid rocks it smoothly boiled,
Silent, intent, resistless, slow.
He stood at gaze. He did not know.
By these words,—he had not meant death?—
He blew a long bright frosty breath,
And watched it fade. The sun broke free,
Misty and red, and on a tree
A crow cawed harshly, balancing
With awkward jerk of tail and wing . . .

Sooner than deal her so much pain,—
Would he not die? And then again
He saw her face go white with grief,
And heard the incaught sob, and brief,
Felt the breath quiver and sharply break,
And saw her eyelids twitch, to take
The gathering tears, unseen, away;
While opened mouth grew racked and grey . . .
Poor broken, sweet, bewildered thing!
He felt her fingers twist and cling:
And pitied her,—ah, pitied her!—
And pitying, felt affection stir:
Affection where there once was love;
His heart felt pain, but did not move . . .

The sun burst haze, and shining bright
Set far white distances alight,
Flashing on tree and snow-sheathed wire,
And icicle, and set afire
Remote ethereal fir-topped hills,
Dazzling on little snow-fed rills.
And under this the city lay,
Soft harmony of gold and grey,—
Drowsy and vague . . . He would go there . . .
Life must be lived . . . He did not care . . .
Not care? A pang swept up in him,
A space the bright world seemed to swim,

Caught in regrets for things gone past,
Strange lovely things that could not last;
And it was pain, at length, to go
From one whom he had once loved so,—
From one who loved him so much still . . .
He turned; and slowly climbed the hill,
Deliberate, with measured pace,
And downward pondering sightless face,
And gained the top; and looking back,
Over the slope where lay his track,
Resolved to write,—not see her more;
Then, in his heart, shut sharp that door.

Days passed: strange colourless quiet days,
Silent and deep. He went his ways,
Pleased with himself at having will
To live his life. And yet, so still,
So strangely laughterless these days went,
They filled him with queer discontent.
His ears craved speech to listen to;
His hands craved touch of hands they knew.
His eyes,—what yearning glimmered there?
Yearning for what eyes, and what hair?
Strange turn of things! even in work
These hollow silences came to lurk;
A queer starvation; soft and slow,
Caressingly, his hands would go

Over smooth surfaces of things,
Seeming to feel them soft as wings;
And little phrases she had said
Recurred like music in his head . . .
Persistent habit? That was it:
His pain was sweet, was exquisite;
Exquisite most because of knowing
That all this loveliness was going,
A passing thing, a fading thing,
Which never again the years could bring . . .
Silence came soft upon the air,
Deep silence that he could not bear;
Dropping, between pace and pace,
Infinite loneliness of space;
Dropping, between tick and chime,
Infinite loneliness of time;
And between word and seldom word
Abysmal nothingness was heard . . .
Unbearable! A thing not known.
He must be blunt, make life his own,
Shatter this solitude with cries,
Shut out the appalling peace of skies,
Roof out the stars, hear music playing,
And hear what everyone was saying,—
Drink down their words, like subtlest wine,
And laughter, making faces shine! . . .

Along the river in curving row
The evening lights began to glow;
Over the bridges, grey and vast,
The luminous long trains glided past,
From crowded houses came the people,
The huge moon rose behind a steeple,
And in the deepening western sky
Now one by one and cold and high
The winter stars came out, to stare
Pitiless down through frozen air.
He walked alone through azure shadows,
Looked longingly through lighted windows,
The cinema? Faint music came
Around him like a gust of flame,
Dissolving him with promises
Of warmth and lights and ecstasies,—
Of hope that in the theatre, dim,
Some woman might sit next to him,
With half-seen face, in shadow, sweet,
Humming, or beating time with feet.
His ticket bought he hastened in,
Hearing the wail of violin,
And down the black aisle stumbled, blind,
Straining his unused eyes, to find
An empty seat, while overhead
The long bright shaft of light was shed,
Pouring and whirring, weaving rays,
Intense white stream, wherein a maze

Of fiery motes whirled up and rose
And dived and swarmed. A seat he chose
And sat and watched the vivid screen,
Rapidly ever-changing scene,
While music, subtly tuned thereto,
Sang and cried, and minutes flew,
To violin and horn and drum . . .
And yet, through all these things, would come
A strange, an aching loneliness,
A yearning for some liveliness,
For touch of hands, for touch of hair,
Soft flesh to stroke . . . Beside him there
No woman came, no girl, and he
Sat mute in lonely misery :
And wondered, if a woman came,
If he could speak, or whether shame
Would silence him, or maybe, fear.
But still none came. The end drew near,
He rose; a vague unhappiness
Came over him, a restlessness.
Where turn? Beneath cold stars he stood,
Perplexed, in dark uncertain mood,
While laughing people jostled by,
And voices lifted, words were high,
And street lights glared on healthy faces.
A foolish mirth! . . . He longed for places
Where there was hush, and dark, and peace . . .
The moon swam coldly . . . Without cease

Along the echoing river wall
He heard the short waves slap and fall,
Quarrel and splash, gurgle and fill;
And here he walked, where night was still,
Save for the waters; where alone
His loud steps rang on freezing stone;
While silent, swift, before him ran
Shadow grotesquely like a man,
Flown long and thin, to wheel in fright
At nearness to another light,
And flee behind,—its master kept
Between it and the light . . . He stept
Quickly, with this for company,
Through light cold wind, and quietly
Pondered the meaning of these days.
Was he not free to go his ways?
Was he not free? Pain swelled his heart,
He struck the mood and tore apart.
Pale sentiment, no more. Grown stern,
To his own rooms he made return,
Drinking the sharp air icily
With vague belief it made him free . . .
He stumbled in the unknown gloom;
And sought a match . . . Somehow this room
Seemed silent, empty, strangely cold,
A hollow place, a place unsouled.
A loose board creaked beneath his tread.
The darkness listened. In his bed,

Coldly upon him, slimy cold,
Sluggishly, fold on quiet fold,
It seemed to him the silence crept
To make it sure he never slept;
And all the long night through it seemed,—
(He knew not if he waked or dreamed,—)
As if some person loved had died . . .
He lay and stared, grey-lipped, wide-eyed.

A loneliness, like silent night,
Came round him cold, came round him white,
And all sounds grew remote therein;
Voices he knew fled far and thin;
Slowly familiar things withdrew
Beyond the little earth he knew;
And in this hush, grown still and strange,
With quiet breath he watched this change
Slowly and deeply touch his life.
Was this the absence of his wife?
Mere madness then: companionship
Meant the lip's need for meeting lip,
Of hand for hand and limb for limb.
This woman's flesh had wearied him.
Why not have new? Had she some hold?
No, there was none. His heart lay cold . . .
From the high window he looked down
On huddled roofs, the snow-white town,
The steam-clouds, blowing, sprawling, sliding,

Fleet shadows underneath them gliding.
Strange, what a tangle life became
As one grew old! . . . And what a shame
That childhood's sweet simplicity
Should stagnate in such shape as he!
Could that sweet freshness be renewed?
He mused in disillusioned mood,
And in his musing backward went
Out of this day of discontent
To a merry world of leafy boughs,
Where orioles were keeping house,
And brown bees tumbling in the clover,
And sunshine on sweet grass, where over,
Feeling it prickly warm, he stole
Intent to find a locust hole . . .
A fountain in a garden pool
Shot a slim shaft and spattered cool,
And on this ever-changing shaft
A quivering white ball danced and laughed . . .
He called to mind how one night, late,
They came home through the garden gate,
And all the garden brimmed and spilled
With moonlight, silver-grey, that filled
The paths and lawns, and on the wall,
Where windy vine-leaves seemed to crawl,
Cast blue mysterious stencillings,
Filling his heart with elvish things.
Were those things lost, that rain, that sun,

And would he no more laugh and run
When a hurdy-gurdy filled the street
With vibrant music, sharply sweet?
His mother, too,—he saw her now,—
Soft eyes, her wise and tranquil brow,
Her mouth, so sweet, so warm, so sure,
Her hands, so gentle, so secure.
He would not see that face again,
Nor feel its softness, soft as rain.
Why did these things come back to him?
What music in him, flowing dim,
Disturbed these long-dead melodies,
These chords of muffled ecstasies?
What soft hand stroked these sleeping things,
Filling the darkness as with wings,
With ghostly laughter, ghostly tears,
Now poignant through the lapse of years?
A music sweet to listen to:
And vaguely now it seemed he knew
Whence came this quiet loveliness,
Suffusing all his loneliness;
Weary at length of dust, of earth
Grown too familiar, that young mirth
Seemed doubly sweet, desirable,
And those illusions:—credible
To such young heart, to such brave eyes,
Lost in the wonder of those skies!
Illusions lost . . . Could he no more

Build castles on infinity's shore? . . .
Then softly through these musings rose,
Like warm air bringing pain to snows,
Subtle belief, dissolving warm,
Slowly and painfully taking form,
That with his dying love for her
Had died these dreams she set astir;
And now these dreams were turned to dust,
All his illusions turned to lust.

The world flew small, remote and dim,—
Shrilling thin music faint to him;
The hostile sun withdrew afar,
Compelling with it moon and star;
All the great seas of light that run
Flowing and falling from the sun,
The tides of life, majestic, vast,
Invisibly receded, passed
In darkness down, with murmurous roar,
As seas withdraw down shingle shore,
Into a night turned fathomless,
So silent, cold and rhythmless.
Desolate, bleak, in wind he stood,
Questioning freezing solitude,
Searching the darkness with dark face,
Hearing his heart through empty space

With tired beating, with tortured beating,
Wearily through his veins repeating
Pain and pleasure, pain and pleasure,
Life's simple senseless stubborn measure.
There was no star, there was no stone,
Which he could touch and call his own;
There was no tree, no grass, no place,
That knew his touch, and no warm face
Which might towards him turn and fire
Should he go near with dumb desire.
O earth, who sent this soul so straying,
O earth triumphant, earth betraying,
Luring aside with music sweet
These all too swift, too eager feet!
What recompense?—The night came deep,
Upon his heart dropped barren sleep,
Soundless and songless, never stirring,
Time and identical time recurring,
Cold and slow, cold and slow,
Whelming his small heart deep in snow.
Where lift his hands to, where now reach,
Where fling his body, where beseech? . . .
Silence, interminable, vast,
Over his heart its shadow cast,
He lay outstretched, a bleeding thing . . .
When, lo, remote began to sing
A little voice, soft, hardly heard;
Faint and remote the darkness stirred,

Wings were beating, shadows lifting,
Stars through clouds flew wildly drifting,
Went dark again, again shone through
Effulgent in a rent of blue;
And slow seductive music came
Softly upon him, soft as flame,
Caressing him, dissolving him;
The world in moonlight seemed to swim;
The light poured down, like waters rose,
Over him, drowning, seemed to close.
Huge bells upon his body rang,
Clang upon liberating clang,
The whole world cracked and opened up
Spilling its splendour like a cup,
The moon stood still beneath his feet,—
Behold! security was sweet.

O laughter of the living earth,
O greenly springing time of mirth!
Fire through all earth's bosom ran
In concord with the mood of man,
And upward moved in luminous green
To the dreamed-of sun for ages seen.
The moonlight poured her silver down
On waiting furrows dreaming brown;
Was he not furrow ploughed like these
Now drinking deep of April's ease,

Drinking of rains and drinking sun
For nurture of new youth just begun?—
He grew in stature, touched the sky;
Commanded, with imperious eye,
All earth and heaven, now so young
With April's fires within him sung . . .
Was not first love forgotten, dead? . . .
The little phrases she had said
Once more in darkness now recurred,
Clearly and sweetly, word by word,—
And left him cold . . . He yawned and smiled . . .
Yes, she was after all a child,—
Sweet because childish, briefly sweet,—
An April sunlight, flashing fleet . . .
She had been sweet to touch, to kiss;
But once forgotten, would he miss?
Under the eaves the bare boughs moved,
Scraping the wall . . . This girl, once loved,
He loved no more; and now he sent
Out of his heart, to banishment,
This face, these eyes, this golden hair;
And lying dark in comfort there,
It seemed he put down tenderly
Her hands, that clung beseechingly
To hold his heart,—freed one by one
Finger from finger, put them down;
And pondering on this painful thing
Felt pleasure through his pulses sting . . .

The long days opened, full and sweet,
Music through all their hours beat,
The sun waxed warm, the trees flashed green,
The birds sang loud the boughs between,—
Their songs were in his own heart sung,
And all the earth seemed once more young.
His loneliness—was it not need
Of flesh for flesh? So, once more freed,
He took a girl to walk with him
One twilight by the river; dim,
The lustrous flow beneath them spread,
Where lamps threw green and lamps threw red,
And all along the shadowy walk
The lovers came to laugh and talk,
To lean upon the parapet
Against the river in silhouette,
Discussing sweet, in lowest tone,
The moon,—until that night unknown!—
Which burned behind the chimney-pots
And filled with magic vacant lots . . .
Along the stones they scuffed their feet,
Loitering much, for life was sweet,
To count the stars above the steeple,
And search the eyes of all the people.
He paused, to light a cigarette.
She said how glad she was they'd met:
Watching with wistful eyes the flame
That warmly lit his hands.—Her name—

It hardly mattered though?—was May;
The name was common, out her way.
He took her arm; they strolled along,
While bargemen sang a wordless song;
And one by one, remotely, then,
The church bells pealed the hour of ten.
. . . Pretty, the river was, at night
When all the lanterns were alight! . . .
Her arm beneath his thumb was warm.
Desire in him took eager form,
The blood rose blossoming to his brain,
He gripped her hand to point of pain.
Yes, it was pretty . . . like romance.
Their eyes met, in a furtive glance,
And could not look away, but burned
Into each other's soul, and yearned,
Shameless and large, for flesh, now sweet,
And the pulses' beat confused with beat.
They stood so, silent, swaying slightly,
Smile meeting intimate smile; then lightly,
'Time to go home?—' and while she talked
Along more luminous streets they walked,
Affecting an airiness of tone
Far from the blood's intense sweet drone,
And a light laughter, smooth and sweet,
Mantling the heart's terrific beat.
His hand beneath her elbow pressed,
Feeling the softness of her breast,

Her breast now his; he could not speak;
He leaned to her, grown faintly weak;
His lips grew dry; and suddenly came
Sharp realization of his shame,
Torrents of memories filled his brain
Clouding the flesh's bliss with pain,
Whirling his thoughts out like a wind.
Was it betrayal,—had he sinned?
Tumult ensued. He felt her arm
Under his hand, so living warm,
And feeling this, he closed his eyes,
Forbade those troubling dreams to rise,
And suddenly laughed, more swiftly walking,
Listened intently, started talking,
And squeezed her hand; for answer came
A smile indulgent, free from shame,
A smile that stripped her body bare,
Let down her golden-laddered hair . . .
Within her room, she stood a space
To doff her hat; then raised her face
Drowsy, to kiss, with half-shut eyes,
And clung. He felt her full breast rise
Quivering, soft, beneath his breast;
Body to aching body pressed,
Knee sought for knee to fuse with it;
Mouth upon mouth fed exquisite.
Torrential flesh!—The darkness fell.
Far off ran reelings of a bell

Around the sky; then all was still
Save for vague steps that climbed a hill,
That climbed and climbed, drew ever near,
Came up, grew swift, swelled loud and clear,
Brought rush of winds, confusing roar,
Huge waters upon a sandy shore,
Reverberating, falling, beating,
Withdrawing rhythmical, repeating,
Filling the night, the seas, the air,
Rising and falling everywhere.
Vast bells upon his body rang,
Clang upon liberating clang :
The whole world cracked and opened up
And spilled its splendour like a cup.

O darkness, drenching all things deep,
Profound impenetrable sleep,
Falling so sweetly and so slowly
To make even dust in starlight holy,
Falling at last on time and space,—
O darkness,—loveliest of face !
Bringing intense and wearied light
Secure at last to restful night;
Bringing to cool peace the sun's heat
Whose feverish golden hammers beat
All day long, on stubborn soil
And stubborn bough, in fruitful toil,—

All the fierce youthlight wearied so
In pouring life, in aching flow !—
Now came this darkness softly down
Together bliss and pain to drown
In soundless perfectly pouring stream,
Dark lustrous flood unflecked by dream.
Remote the world in whispers flew,
Remote the stars and moon withdrew,
The tides moved slowly, sleepily,
The weary blood moved sluggishly;
While heart, asleep, went ever beating,
Wearily through the veins repeating
Pain and pleasure, pain and pleasure,
Life's simple, senseless, tireless measure . . .
Forgetfulness, forgetfulness,
Came down upon all weariness,
Suffusing warm and sure and slow
The blood's alternate pause and flow;
Profound impenetrable death
Laid hush on all save gentle breath . . .
O fevered world could you but keep
Forever so this dreamless sleep ! . . .
Bells pealed. Night passed. The hours rushed on.
Dawn came, then day; then night, then dawn.

A strangely tranquil thing was earth;
Clear light, unsmiling, without mirth.

NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING

Through the young grass, in the bright air,
Tranquillity hung everywhere,
A calm, a slow, deliberate thing,
Bewitching even the bravest wing.
He peered : he could not understand,
But walked as in an unknown land.
The leaves hung motionless in sky;
Water enchanted seemed to lie;
The faint waves fell asleep, half shaped;
The breeze to nothingness escaped.
All earth, as touched by wind of death,
Seemed holding in suspense her breath,
Stirless, dreamless, soulless, still,
A slumber of arrested will.
Who would dare break this silence now,
Whose hand would shake this dreaming bough,
Set trembling all these leaves once more,
Or urge the ripples up the shore?
Tranquillity was all reply :
The answerless calmness of the sky;
And turning from its senseless stare,
He saw his shadow crouching there,
A shadow ominous, ugly, deep;
Even as he looked it seemed to creep
Stealthily close . . . He turned away.
And suddenly all the grass seemed grey.

Listless, he touched piano keys :
The long unpractised melodies
Came broken from his fingers, stirred
Vague hints of colour, sound and word,—
A world that he had lost somewhere,
A world where sunshine filled the air . . .
It was not sad, but pleasant, so
To call to mind things long ago . . .
This simple childlike little tune,—
Meant roses on a night in June ;
In a cool shadowy bowl they lay
A fragrant leafy disarray,—
Whole-hearted opulence of bloom
Glowing and musical in the gloom.
O golden hearts ! He saw them yet,
Glistening, widely opened, wet . . .
Whose careful hands had put them there ?
Who, with blue eyes and golden hair ? . . .
The simple notes like water dropped,
Asked a sweet question, laughed, and stopped . . .
This harsher thing—what did it mean ?
This was remoter, dimly seen—
School days, a winter evening coming,
White glistening night, the wild blood humming,
A run through drifts, in shadowy places,
Then lights and warmth and well-known faces . . .
Something sinister here . . . though most
Was warmly coloured, still,—a ghost . . .

He marred a chord and stopped . . . yet fingered
And tapped stray keys, a long time lingered
On certain minor tones, that beat
Into his soul,—seductive, sweet.
Twilight had come. In dark he played,
Being obscurely, now, afraid
To rise from shadow, turn on light,
And so disclose . . . an empty night . . .
How queerly hard now to believe
That this was not a winter's eve ! . . .
He stood by the window, looking far
Over black roofs to one large star,
And felt great clouds of darkness rise
Under horizon of those skies,
Silent and swift, a baleful dream,
Soon to devour that one star's gleam.
Pregnant with lightnings, these clouds were . . .
A light wind set the leaves astir . . .
Uneasily, in puffs, they showed
Pale undersides; along the road,
Under the arc-lights, dust was whirling,
In sinister little spirals twirling . . .
The night was ominous with threat.
He slept; and yet could not forget,
In sleep, how sudden storm came down
Over the silence of the town;
He heard the first slow drops of rain
Patter upon a far-off pane,

And pause a moment, and repeat,
And hurry in unison, then, to beat
A multitudinous rhythm there,
Steady, exhaustless, like despair . . .
What gave such talons to this rain?
He lived his whole life through again . . .
That night two months ago recalling
When snow and sleet were all night falling,
When storm whirled up from all his life,
Being tired at last, of her, his wife.
It seemed again he suffered there,
And heard the elm-boughs creaking bare,
Scraping the eaves, in agony,
Tossed by relentless wind, while he
Lay in an anguish, stretched and torn,
Eyes wide with pain, unclosed, forlorn . . .
Had he then, once, so deeply loved
This woman, now so far removed?
He closed his eyes, closed out the storm:
The air came fragrant, stealing warm,—
Pregnant with lilacs, shaking sweet
Their purple crowns along the street;
While he, his young soul turbulent,
Under the stars through dark streets went . . .
The church bells pealed a languid eight:
He quickened pace lest he be late . . .
And then, behind the glass door, she,
Far lovelier than a dream could be,

With smiling lips and grave shy eyes,
So beautiful, so warm, so wise . . .
Came subtly timid, subtly proud,
Making his pulses push and crowd . . .
And clamour and cry . . . while with slow hand,
Smiling, she drew the latch, to stand
Against the wall, whole leagues away,
Shrinking and sweet, no word to say . . .
Cold came the talons of this rain.
Why must he give himself such pain?
Why hark back now to what was dead? . . .
Lost was the magic of that head . . .
Forever lost, with youth and all
Bright dreams that fall when youth must fall.
Was he not now of all this free,
This specious glamour, witchery,
Contented now with humble dust:
Forswearing love, espousing lust?
This woman by the river, then,—
He saw her drowsy face again;
Had she not wholly satisfied?
Had lust not found its perfect bride? . . .
The pulses murmurous through his veins
Bore multitudinous tread of rains,
Unhappy ceaseless melodies,
Tireless, tireless, threnodies.
Was something lost, some lovely thing,
Flash of blossom, whir of wing,

Hover of dream, the sun that lies
Perpetual myth in childhood's eyes?
Was this worth having? Could he go
Back to that world? . . . He did not know . . .
But thought again how he had crept
Through the dark house to where she slept,
With one arm lying above her there,
Amid her lustrous spread of hair,
And how the sweetness of her face
Had caught his heart a breathing space,
And how he kissed her then, and went
(Not knowing well what these things meant,)
To his own room again, to lie
In stretched and tortured misery.
So she would sleep when she was dead:
Dishevelled, pale . . .

Swift through his head
Came words and phrases she had spoken,
Huddled and breathless, halting, broken,—
Disturbing music, word by word,
The well-known phrases he had heard,
Day after day, so many years;
Till in his wide eyes, warm, crept tears . . .
Could he go back to her once more,—
And all the young bright world she wore,

That world of luminous rain and sun,
All of whose brightness now was done?
And, if he loved her now, could she
Bring back life's lost simplicity? . . .
Through all his blood flew gusts of rain . . .
And suddenly now it all seemed plain:
It was his soul's returning need
For her from whom he thought it freed,
That drove him forth, two nights ago,
To love a girl he did not know;
And now his whole soul turned again
To her whom he had dealt such pain.
Why, if he loved her no more now,
Was it such torment, thinking how
She smiled, or spoke, in years gone by?
Why think how he had made her cry,
This time or that, with callous word?—
Sharp through the years her sob he heard,
Slight as a breath, a terrible thing,
And saw her hands repel and cling,
And, fugitive, her eyes, dark blue,
Brim bright with sullen tears, where through
She looked from infinite distances,
Beseeching gaze fixed deep on his;
Then sentences that broken came
Dissolving him in flaming shame . . .
Could he not now arise from lust,—
Nobler than dust, arise from dust? . . .

And all this intervening space—
How had she been?—With frightened face
He watched the darkness,—quivering, still;
Had she been well? Had she been ill?
And suddenly, mute, went up the cry—
O God, if somehow she should die!
This rain—did it not fall to-night
Above her body's hidden white,
Stealing through all that darkness down
To damp her hair and stain with brown
Her small soft eyelids, fast shut now,
And the white wisdom of her brow?
O earth, that you should humble deep
Such rose as this in endless sleep!
And suddenly then, released of weight,
He knew her living, and elate
Caught sharp his heart on verge of laughter,
Drew a deep tranquil breath, and after,
Being dropped in quiet misery,
Relaxed in sudden agony,
Turned on his face, let fall the years,
And eased his heart with birth of tears.
O foolish, blind, courageous youth!
He knew at last the secret truth.
Confusion came . . . This little tune
Meant roses on a night in June . . .
In a cool shadowy bowl they lay,
A fragrant green-leaved disarray.

Whose careful hands had put them there,—
Who, with blue eyes and golden hair?
O glowing hearts : he saw them yet,
Glistening, widely-opened, wet . . .
A fountain in a garden pool
Shot a slim shaft and spattered cool,
And on this ever-changing shaft
A wonderful white ball danced and laughed . . .
Illusions lost . . . could he no more
Build castles on infinity's shore? . . .
Sleep stole upon him as he smiled,
And in his dreams he ran a child.

Outside his room a robin sang.
Sun to his heart shot gleaming pang.
And now the grass lay cool and sweet
And glistening for his early feet.
The sunlight on his eyes was warm,
Dearer it was for last night's storm,
Hazily on the town it lay,
Shimmering gold on softest grey;
While joyously he walked along
Feeling the deep world shake with song.
His heart, like early morning earth,
Bloomed fragrant now with strange new birth;
Lilac-hedge and willow-tree
Trembled within with fiery glee,

Feeling the music of this sun
Through leaf and blossom subtly run . . .
Laughter rose upward in him light;
The spiders, busy through the night,
Had spun grey webs on hedge and lawn;
O lovely world revealed by dawn! . . .
His heart beat rapidly. He went
Through this bright world with wonderment,
Feeling a softness in this air,
A tenderness to heal despair,—
Soft light like broken waters falling;
Songs of birds; low voices calling;
Music bubbling from deep springs,
And flash of sun on dewy wings.
Swiftly he went. Familiar places
Lifted serene and joyous faces.
This tree he knew: this hedge, this stone;
Through his own heart these leaves had grown.
Sweetly these things now spoke of her,
They gave him news, they set astir,
With gleams and perfumes faintly whirled,
A dim, a half-forgotten world.
Came she not forth in these things so
To meet her lover, let him know
That she was now, as always, his?
His heart brimmed up with melodies.
He climbed the hill with pang of fear
Lest somehow she should not be here.

There was her window! opened wide.
Someone was moving there inside . . .
Trying to call, his voice twice broke
Before the simple name he spoke.

Thus dust in starlight had its dream:
Thinking to hold to some faint beam
Of far-off, holier, higher things,
Be borne from dust by dream of wings.

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